

Omaha, the Prairie City

William R. Lighton

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"Rare are the buttons on a Roman's breeches,
In antiquarian eyes surpassing riches:
Rare is each crack'd, black, rotten earthen dish,
That held of ancient Rome the flesh and fish."

THUS wrote Peter Pindar; and Dr. Holmes, in kindred mood, said that "fifty years make everything hopelessly old-fashioned, without giving it the charm of real antiquity. There are too many talkative old people who remember all about that time; and at best half a century is a half-baked bit of ware."

It was a little chilling to have memory thrust forward those sayings at the moment of starting to write about Omaha, which is a half-century town. But memory furnished also a remedy for the chill, in the observation of Bacon, that "a Man that is young in Yeares, may be Old in Houres, if he have lost no Time." Omaha has lost no time. In the first part of the year 1854 there was not the first premonitory symptom of a town; now there is a city of more than one hundred thousand inhabitants, and within a radius of ten miles the people number nearly a quarter of a million. If we measure by the scale of contrasts, we may well say that the city had its beginning in a remote antiquity.

It is doubtful when white men first set foot upon this soil. In 1673 Father Marquette accurately mapped the confluence of the Platte and Missouri rivers; but his map was drawn "upon information and belief," as the lawyers say. He got his data from the Indians. Probably the earliest authentic map of this region to be drawn from actual knowledge was that made by Lewis and Clark, who were here in 1804. But long before the coming of Lewis and Clark the skirmish line of civilization had passed the mouth of the Platte, and moved on into the northwestern wilderness. The skirmishers made a motley crowd, of mixed motives and interests, — Jesuit missionaries, hunters, trappers, agents of the fur companies, Indian traders, and on down the scale to mere restless-footed adventurers. Some wandering Frenchmen had entered the Missouri country by way of Canada and the Great Lakes; they had formed trading compacts with many of the Indian tribes, and some had entered into conjugal misalliances with Indian women. The effects of those unions can be traced to this day, if one cares to take the trouble. In Astoria Irving tells of one Dorion, who had associated himself more or less intimately with several bands, and who had as his "habitual wife" a Sioux squaw. That was not an exceptional case; there were many like Dorion, although few left legible records of their doings.

The Canadian French formed but a part of the pioneer stragglers. It is probable that the Missouri itself was the main-traveled avenue of that early incursion; for the waterway offered the easiest approach to the country, and also the easiest means for carrying away the plunder of traffic. More than a century ago, the American Fur Company, whose headquarters were at St. Louis, established trading posts at many places upon the Upper Missouri. But these were not towns in any sense of the word. That was not a time for town-building.

It was the gold excitement of 1849 that first brought the whites to this part of the West in considerable numbers, and resulted in the planting of the first permanent settlements. The lands beyond the Missouri were then in possession of the Indians, and the only right the whites enjoyed was to pass peacefully over the trail that led up the valley of the Platte. But Iowa had been ceded to civilization, and upon the eastern bank of the Missouri there grew up a few rudimentary towns that were engaged in "outfitting" the gold hunters for their trip across the plains. Amongst all such seats of traffic there was hot rivalry for preeminence. In this neighborhood the most successful in that struggle was the place first known as Kaneshville, which was afterward absorbed into the present city of Council Bluffs, directly opposite Omaha. After a little time Kaneshville became the metropolis of the Salt Lake trail, and attracted to itself a great host of adventurers of all sorts, — just the kind of populace that is now swarming in the camps and towns that supply the Klondike and the Cape Nome country. Every mother's son was

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in quest of sudden and great wealth.

But they were not all men of the moment, content with the moment's opportunities. Some were mindful of the time when the broad prairies beyond the river would be opened for settlement, and when Fortune would strike into a swifter pace. Men of that stripe will always feel themselves handicapped by even a fictitious limitation upon their activity. The men of Kaneshville chafed under the law which kept them from Nebraska soil. That restriction was soon removed. The Kansas-Nebraska Bill was signed by Franklin Pierce on May 30, 1854. The more enterprising ones of Council Bluffs had surreptitiously "located" a town site on the new soil many months in advance of authority; that is, they had selected a likely place, and were awaiting only the conclusion of formalities before taking open possession. The date fixed for the incoming of settlers was early in July, 1854, and the freshly glorified Fourth was celebrated in the new-made Omaha City.

There were strong differences between the motives of the Kansans and the Nebraskans. The opening of Kansas put the nation into a passion; the opening of Nebraska did little more than to stimulate commercial activity. Kansas stood for a conflict of ideas and for a conquest by blood; Nebraska stood for an every-day sort of neighborliness, for peaceful settlement and home-making, and for a conquest by simple business sagacity. Yet the beginning of Nebraska was picturesque in the extreme, with rose-hued romance and dun-colored actuality inextricably intertwined. Not a foot of railroad had been built in Iowa, and there was no communication with the world save as wagon trains or horsemen came straggling over the Iowa trails, or as the half-tramp boats struggled up the uncertain river from St. Louis. The new land was then more remote than is any part of our nation to-day; yet the people lacked nothing that would make them equal to their life. It was a society sufficient unto itself, having its own localized ideas and purposes and its own mode for working out its salvation. Closer proximity to the established institutions of civilization would hardly have helped the movement; it would have been more likely to hinder, by damping the frank ingenuousness of the impulse. Nebraska was very well off in those days, although the people did some unwise and even grotesque things. The first of all matters to engage their attention was the building of a legion of towns. Wherever a ferryboat touched the western bank of the stream it made the soil pregnant, and there a town quickened.

Towns, no less than states or nations, must have some reason for being; the birth of a hamlet is no more fortuitous than the birth of an empire. Nevertheless, it is hard to give a just reason for the beginning of Omaha. There seems to be but one word for it, — the overworked American word "enterprise." Other towns — many Western towns — have sprung from an exalted thought, and been nourished by the blood of sacrifice. Omaha had no such experience. The mother of Omaha was Expediency; among its founders there were no martyrs to a great social cause, but there was a good general average of manly honor and faithfulness to the plain duties of every day; the settlement was not led by eminent captains of industry or commerce, but the rank and file of the settlers held many clear-sighted, stout-hearted traders and workers. Omaha owed its establishment, as it has owed the best of its later growth to the multiplication of the simple arts of peace and to a commonalty of well-being. It was a beginning almost commonplace, — almost, but not quite. The element of romance averted commonplaceness. From an early history I quote this description of the first house that was built here: —

"The house was of round logs, and stood on the corner of Jackson and Twelfth streets. It was intended for a town house, and being the general headquarters for a time, was known under the name of the 'St. Nicholas.' Here those who had claims would congregate in the evenings; cook their bacon, corn bread, and coffee in the centre of the room, where a portion of the puncheon floor had been removed for a fireplace, and sing songs and pass away the evening. Later, one Johnson pitched a tent on the corner of Cass and Thirteenth streets, which was in time supplanted by a sod-and-board shanty, that was named the 'Big Six,' where the first saloon was established, to which the town-house men would often pay a visit, wading through grass knee-deep."

Omaha was already claiming a population of hundreds; but those hundreds were actually living in Council Bluffs, awaiting the time when walls and roofs could be built. Before the town had any real existence a postmaster was appointed; and when it was but three weeks old, and while the postmaster was carrying the mail about with him in the crown of his hat, a newspaper was established! Twelve issues make a complete file of that baby newspaper. I quote from the initial editorial: —

"Well, strangers, friends, patrons, and good people generally, wherever in the wide world your lot may be cast, here we are upon Nebraska soil, seated upon the stump of an ancient oak, which serves for an editorial chair, and with the top of our badly abused beaver hat for a table, we propose inditing a leader for the Omaha Arrow. . . .

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There sticks our axe in the trunk of an old oak whose branches have for years been fanned by the breezes that constantly sweep from over the oft-times flower-dotted prairie lea, and from which we propose making a log for our cabin. . . . The pioneering squatter and the uncivilized red men are our constituents and neighbors, the wolves and deer our traveling companions, and the wild birds and prairie winds our musicians. . . .

"Last night we slept in our sanctum, the starry-decked heaven for a ceiling, and our mother earth for a floor. It was a glorious night, and we were tired from the day's exertions. Far away on different portions of the prairie glimmered the camp fires of our neighbors, the Pawnees, Omahas, or that noble and too often unappreciated class of our people known as pioneers or squatters. We gathered around our little camp fire, talked of times in the past, of the pleasing present, and of the glorious future which the march of civilization should open in the land whereon we sat. . . . Behind us was spread our buffalo robe in an old Indian trail, which was to serve as our bed. The cool night wind swept in cooling breezes around us, deep-laden with the perfume of a thousand-hued and various flowers. Far away upon our lee came the occasional long-drawn howl of the prairie wolves. Talk of comfort! There was more of it in one hour of our sanctum camp life upon Nebraska soil than in a whole life of fashionable pampered world in the settlements."

Neither in the town nor in the territory had government taken form; the citizens were administering their affairs in something like committee of the whole; yet life was fairly orderly and decent, simply because the people wished to have it so.

A governor was appointed for the territory, but he did not arrive upon the scene until October. Then he stopped at Bellevue, a town twelve miles below Omaha, meaning to make that place the seat of the territorial government; but he died three weeks later, and the territorial secretary, who became acting governor, brought the capital to Omaha, where it remained until 1867, when Nebraska was admitted to statehood. At the first session of the legislature the question of the permanent location of the capital aroused no little bitterness. Every town upon the new soil was clamorous to be chosen. "The excitement was very great at times," wrote an early historian. "The lobbies were once crowded with the respective parties to the contest, armed with bludgeons, brickbats, and pistols. A fight was thought to be imminent, but it did not occur. . . . The elections were eminently farcical, owing to the fact that many districts where white men had never slept more than one night were represented by members who talked loudly of their 'constituents.'"

At some time in the winter of 1854-55 the dead governor was succeeded by an appointee from Arkansas, one Mark W. Izard. Here is the story of the inaugural ball: —

"The rooms had a single coat of what was then called plastering, composed of frozen mud, and a very thin coating at that. The floor was rough and unplanned, and had been energetically scrubbed for the occasion; but the night being dreadfully cold, and the heating apparatus failing to warm the room, the water froze upon the floor and could not be melted. Rough cottonwood boards on either side of the room were substitutes for chairs.

"The hour of seven having arrived, the grand company began to assemble. Long before the appointed hour his Arkansas Excellency appeared in the dancing hall. . . . Izard was the guest of nine ladies, who were all that could be mustered, even for a state occasion, in Omaha. Two of the ladies could not dance, and their places were supplied by gentlemen. . . . Jim Orton was the solitary fiddler, occupying the corner of the room. . . . The supper came off about midnight, and consisted of coffee with brown sugar, but no milk, sandwiches of a peculiar size, very thick, and made up of a singular mixture of bread of radical complexion, and bacon. This menu was supplemented with dried-apple pie; and there being no tables in those days, it was 'passed around.' The governor, being from a warmer climate, stood around shivering with the cold, but bore himself with amiable fortitude, buoyed up by the honors thus showered upon him; and at the proper time, under a deep sense of his own consequence, made a speech returning thanks for the high honors done him."

Such was the beginning. In July, 1855, Omaha had about 200 residents; in 1857 this number had increased to about 1800, and then, for the first time an orderly government by statutes and law officers was put into effect. It was not until the latter year that any consistent attempt was made to develop the outlying farm lands. A land office was then established; before that time it had been impossible for a settler to get title to his acres. After those three formless years there was organization and the beginning of progress. Churches and schools were built; there was a public library of 4000 volumes, and a citizens' association provided a course of ten lectures for the benefit of a library fund; the federal government was erecting a substantial building, to cost \$100,000; \$50,000 had been expended in constructing a military road to connect Omaha with Fort Kearney, and there was an appropriation of

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\$400,000 for building a wagon road to South Pass that was to place the town in commercial communication with the great West. All this in three years.

The panic of 1857 affected the newer districts no less than the old, — not by wrecking fortunes already amassed, but by retarding development. One of the most serious effects was in the delay of railroad-building. Beginning with the work of Fremont, numberless surveys had been made for a Pacific railway, and numberless construction companies had been organized for carrying on the work. National aid was for a long time denied, and the building of the Union Pacific was not begun until 1863. The road was completed in May, 1869; and in the meantime three great railway systems had extended their lines across Iowa. That was the beginning of modern Omaha, as it was the beginning of the modern West. From that time to the present, material progress has suffered no serious checks but such as have been imposed by the erratic moods of the people themselves.

Omaha stands for the life of the prairies, to which it owes its own life; its past and future must be read not alone in the temper and inclinations of its own corporate citizens, but also in the motives of the men who have been engaged in turning the wild prairies into farms and gardens. For the purpose of measurement and valuation it must not be isolated; it must be considered as merely an integral part of the middle Missouri country. It is not a cosmopolitan city, — in the nature of things it cannot be; at its greatest and best it must be and remain a farm town, with all that that implies. Consider that within a circle of seven hundred miles or more in diameter, with Omaha as the centre, there is practically no source of wealth save in crops and herds. No country hamlet of the region is more truly the creature of the farms. Those partial disasters which the city has experienced have resulted from its failure to see or to acknowledge its dependence. The people have nursed some leaping ambitions, and have tried to ignore the inevitable; but they have had to pay the price down to the last decimal.

Readers will remember that in the years from 1885 to 1890 the middle West was in travail with a "boom." Both city and country were involved, but in different degrees. In its relation to the farm lands the boom was little more than a passing delusion; in very many towns and cities it amounted to a frenzy of false views and attitudes. The people of Omaha then fancied that they could read clear their title to a vague immensity, and adopted a course of behavior that has flavored every succeeding year with bitterness. The corporate limits of the town were greatly enlarged, and the surrounding prairies broke out in a rash of pretentious "additions." Quiet cornfields that lay ten miles from the heart of things were surveyed and platted into town lots, which were sold for a hundred times their real value. It does not appear that any one was willing to show disloyalty to his fellows by questioning the future; and so the process of booming was continued until the frenzy was spent by its own force. Of course there was no good reason for such conduct, — no shadow of reason save in an ill-considered desire for an unearned greatness.

"We may outrun, By violent swiftness, that which we run at, And lose by over running."

That proved to be exactly true in the case of Omaha. It outran sober judgment, sound sense, and all the virtues of that old-fashioned class, until there was real danger that it would be "like a candle ill made, that smothers the splendor of a happy fortune in its own grease." The boom did not consist only in inflation of real estate values; it went much farther. There was a craze for wholesale inflation; most of all, a craze for a big population. As other places have thought, so thought Omaha, that if only enough people came in there would be a great city. Thousands of people and millions of money were sucked into that maelstrom of insanity. But means of support cannot be provided by mere enthusiasm, however honest. The city of Omaha makes its living only as a sort of corporate middleman for the tenants of the tributary farms; and as this business is limited to a certain volume, its profits will not support an unlimited number, no matter how loudly the ambitious people may whoop about it. Omaha wanted to grow, regardless of the farms, and so grew beyond the true measure of its usefulness and power; then when it got back its consciousness it had to sit down in wretched idleness, while waiting for the undeveloped farms to catch up.

But the boasted growth was not all bona fide. The census of 1890 showed a population of 140,000, while the census of 1900 shows but 103,000. The plain truth is that the returns of 1890 were "padded," probably for political ends. Padding was the key to the mood of the time. In 1890 Omaha really had 85,000 or 90,000 people. When the announcement for 1900 was made, the citizens were a little dismayed for a day or two; but now they are quite complacently congratulating themselves that every one knew the earlier figures to be a lie!

In fact, within the latter half of the past decade Omaha has had a substantial growth in population, in industrial activity, and in wealth. Here are the figures, got from authoritative sources: —

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1890.	1901.	_____	
Output of factories . . .	\$68,000,000 . . .	\$121,000,000 . . .	Inc. 78%
Jobbing trade	47,000,000 . . .	93,000,000 . . .	Inc. 98%
Bank deposits	14,782,200 . . .	25,764,245 . . .	Inc. 78%
City directory	45,260	55,000 . . .	Inc. 22%
School enrollment	13,279	19,384 . . .	Inc. 48%

These figures give an accurate index to what has been achieved in Omaha; but their greatest value is in indicating (what is far more important) the growth of the prairies that make Omaha.

The saddest and most disastrous of all the effects of the boom was in inciting a majority of the middle Western cities of metropolitan pretensions to inaugurate a system of municipal government that was much too large for the work necessary to be done. In this respect Omaha suffered more than most of her sister cities. As a matter of good common sense, Omaha needed no elaborate scheme of government. It was nothing but an overgrown country town; its people were pastoral, and really wanted nothing better than to have their town's affairs administered according to the dictates of pastoral prudence and thrift. But one city set the example of overdoing, and the rest jealously followed; and now the people have on their hands a political "machine" as burdensome as a large family of white elephants. There is not enough to give the machine legitimate occupation; so it has turned its attention to the illegitimate, and the people are suffering from "ring politics," bossism, and all the evils of that breed, on down to official corruption. It began with the boom, but no one knows where it will end.

"Had doting Priam checked his son's desire, Troy had been bright with fame, and not with fire."

Surely no good citizen should decry a wise devotion to the problems of good government; but here is a tendency to be passionately enamored of professional politics in its poorest form. La Bruyere said that "there is what is called the highway to posts and honors, and there is a cross- and by-way, which is much the shortest." That "cross- and by-way" has been the favored route out here. The functions of public officers have been debased from lawgiving, in its true sense, to mere lawmaking; machine-made, "hand-me-down" laws are usurping the place of plain, honest rules of action, and the government of the city has been carried to the point of making it a trade, for the profit of the tradesmen in power. Reckless extravagance marked the beginning. With no need for such action, the boundaries of the city were widened to include more than twenty-five square miles, and over this area there was spread a close network of "improvements," — grading, paving, sewerage, and so forth; and that course was not stopped until the people either would not or could not vote any more bonds. They were already saddled with a bonded indebtedness of \$5,000,000. The city presents an anomalous appearance to-day: there are entire quarter sections of farm lands lying within the corporate limits, still planted to crops, while subject to regular and "special" municipal taxation. Many owners of such property have been ruined in consequence of this condition; for because of the burden of taxes these lands have a lower market value than those lying outside the city.

The tax levy for the year 1901 closely approximates the sum of \$1,250,000 (or say \$12 per capita), which will be expended for interest on bonded debt, and for current administrative expenses of this overgrown government. There is no municipal ownership of any public utilities; water, gas, electric lighting, and so forth, the city buys from franchised companies or corporations, which in turn have got their franchises from the machine. In 1899 there was paid for public water rates \$90,000, and for street-lighting \$80,000. The era of franchised corporations brought a new order of political evils, and the people have not yet devised means for dealing with them. Recourse to the ballot has accomplished no definite reform. The citizens of Omaha have sometimes displayed an almost morbid interest in voting, but within the past ten years they have not often succeeded in voting aright. They have lacked clear understanding of the situation, and have also lacked able leadership in organizing to combat it. Almost every Western city of any considerable size has this difficult problem to solve. It is the price that must be paid for having tried to do too much within a little time.

Omaha sprawls. Horizontally it is a great city. Even the chance visitor is impressed at once by the want of cohesion and solidity. It is like the unjointed skeleton of a man, scattered over a ten-acre lot: the bones are here, and they are bones of a man's size, but they want articulation. The front of the town extends for seven miles along the river, presenting a most ungainly aspect, broken and dilapidated, so that it seems to be grinning widely at the world with a mouth whose front teeth are missing. The city began upon the river bank; but after a little while, when it had got its false notions of bigness, it longed to set its mark upon the hilltops, five miles away, and then

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its first work was abandoned and suffered to crumble. That district is now largely dedicated to vice; for Omaha feels that if it is to be indeed a city, it must indulge all those forms of viciousness which contribute to the appearance of cosmopolitanism. I have talked with officers of the city government who seemed to congratulate themselves in saying that they had assumed a "liberal" attitude toward all manner of social evils.

From its base line upon the Missouri the town has cast itself down upon its belly, stretching out its arms to the utmost over miles of territory, crying greedily, "It's mine, — all mine!" But in no true sense has the city possessed its miles. In appearance Omaha is to-day no more than a big aggregation of little towns. Citified dignity and village simplicity rub elbows on every street. Here, on one corner, is a mammoth modern structure of stone and steel that cost \$1,000,000; and within the adjoining block is a row of tottering frame hovels abandoned to the rats. It is in the residence districts that this contrast is most striking. Go out upon almost any of the main streets, and you will presently come to an unbroken half mile of stately avenue, grown with beautiful trees, and lined with a double row of as pretentious homes as you can find anywhere. Before you can fairly catch your breath you have passed from that scene into one of utter desolation. The asphalt pavement has given place to deep-rutted yellow earth; your feet are treading a rotted wooden sidewalk or a beaten dirt path, arched over and all but obstructed by a tangle of sunflowers and wild hemp. You will think you have come to the suburbs. But Omaha has no suburbs save in the heart of the city: "improvement" has merely dropped a stitch. After walking for a quarter of a mile through that wilderness of weeds you will come to another stretch of proud avenue, with parks and fountains and massive mansions. Between those districts there will likely be cultivated cornfields and cabbage patches. New York could be set down upon the ground included within Omaha's boundaries, and would hardly lap over the edges.

The outward aspect of Omaha affords a clue to its intellectual and moral attitude. Its life is still rude, almost unformed. The people are very sensitive upon this point. It is all one's life is worth to say that the town lacks culture. Culture! What a word that is! Omaha has true-hearted and refined men and women in plenty; but, rather strangely, these have not succeeded in uniting to form a true-hearted and refined society. I think the people are a little chary of expressing their gentleness and refinement in public, for fear of being considered unsophisticated or rural. That would be hard to bear; for the town has only very lately passed out of its rural days. Whatever the cause, the open social life of the place is concerned with appearances, not with verities; it is made up mostly of postures and show; it is continually calling attention to itself in a loud voice, after the manner of those who are rudely affected, the world over. There is no new thing that lifts above the horizon of "culture" which the people of Omaha do not forthwith import, if it promises to be fashionable. With all its intense longing to appear cultured, the town succeeds only in being up to date. In fact, Omaha has no strong collective social aims; it has no strong aggregate tendencies. Its life thus far has been nothing but a conglomerate of individual desires, and there has been no adequate means for bringing these desires to a focus. The city has no public art galleries, no museums, — nothing of that sort; even in architecture no particular ideals have come to light. This condition is a part of the penalty which the town has had to pay for the lack of ideals in its foundation. It was begun for no better reason than that its founders saw here opportunities for getting rich, and that paucity of thought has persisted.

Colton argued that "men, by associating in masses, as in camps and in cities, improve their talents, but impair their virtues." That saying is reduced to its least significance when it is applied to a farm town. An agricultural state, pure and simple, gives to its cities economic stability; in a still greater degree do they get moral stamina. Nebraska is preeminently the farming state of the Union, and statistics show that she leads also in the social virtues. Illiteracy is at its lowest, and most of the crime relates back to poor, simple Eve and the apple. On the farm social relations are fundamental, and life is correspondingly tranquil. This does not imply moral inertia, but a primary estate of sound, rational behavior. A city that is in close relations with such surroundings must be influenced thereby. Omaha has been greatly influenced. The best thing to be said of the place is that beneath the false, frothy surface there is a deep and strong current of moral integrity. That this has not made bold show of itself is due to lack of inciting occasion. The people have known no great common vicissitudes that should draw them together and test the fibre of the common temper. Should such a trial come, it would be met with an amazing strength and power of sacrifice for good ends. The life of the prairies has made good men, but has given them no especial motive beyond individual eagerness to get on, no particular ideal save to possess their strength in peace.

"A nation's character is the sum of its splendid deeds," said Clay; and Emerson, in writing of Boston, declared that "a community, like a man, is entitled to be judged by its best." The best of Omaha is very good indeed. If one

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is inclined to be hasty or harsh in judgment, it is well to remember the rule of the humane judge, who will temper the severity of his sentence in consideration of youth. Bear in mind that the whole history of Omaha is included in the span of forty-eight years; then say whether it has done well. No one who has taken the trouble to get into close touch with the people of this magnificent young West can entertain a moment's doubt for the future. The future is in safe hands. When the people get to know what it is that they have to do, they will arise and do it; and woe betide him who stands in the way of their honest desires. He must be hardy indeed who would undertake to compass them about with the usages of dishonor. Omaha will find the way, and will keep to it.

It would be a mistake to argue that the actual or potential greatness of the city is brought within too narrow limits by the lack of variety in the resources and activities of the region upon which it must draw for the raw materials of its greatness. The domain that is directly tributary to Omaha comprises a large part of the future food gardens of the world. It is idle to try to summarize these resources, for they are boundless, and they make the most infallible of all sources of wealth and power. The present state of development has hardly served to make a scratch upon the outmost cuticle of affairs. Not the city alone, but the whole of the Missouri country as well, is still in a mewling industrial infancy: not in the least particular has maturity been attained; not in the least degree do the people appreciate what this land may be. It is safe to say that all the real difficulties of past and present are like the common little ailments of childhood. Society is plastic and protean, and behavior in all ways is often whimsical, and rarely built upon sound and safe rules dictated by practical experience. There is plenty of law, but no fixed policy; there is plenty of industry, but no recognized scheme for a concerted industrial development. All that remains to be evolved, — and it will come.

That the people are now inclined to a wise course may be seen in almost every detail of the new life, as it expresses itself in the affairs of every day. The desire for size is giving place to a sincerer desire for strength. In the past, Omaha, like many another neighboring town and city, has been content to get its living by playing the easy part of merchantman; merely trafficking in commodities and catering to the simple daily needs of the people. Not until within the past ten years has it consistently tried to add to the value of what it handled, in the way of manufacture; and thus it has missed its greatest opportunities. What may be done by manufactories in Omaha and other cities of the Missouri Valley is incalculable. Heretofore the immense wheat crops of Nebraska, have been sold outside the state, to be bought back as flour. With millions of sheep upon the outlying ranges, there is not a yard of woolen cloth manufactured in the state. With millions of hides and pelts annually offered for sale, there is hardly a shoe or a glove made at home. These examples are illustrative of a general condition. This lack is now being felt. Within a few years the Commercial Club has been organized, and this, under able management, is doing its utmost to correct a faulty condition. The establishment of manufactories will serve a double purpose: it will give greater stability to the town's life by the employment of its citizens, and it will also create home markets for the raw materials that are now sent far away. Notwithstanding its situation in the very heart of the wheat and corn lands, Omaha is not a grain market: the state's great crops of grain sift through Omaha's fingers, going to enrich other towns. This is likely to be remedied before the new century gets into its teens; and the change will link the farm and the city into a firmer union, and give to both a clearer understanding that their interests are inseparable.

The real virtue of the community has found fit expression its public schools. To be sure, the conduct of school affairs has been marked by that extravagance of expenditure which has characterized other administrative functions; but in the schools themselves, and in what they stand for, is the crowning glory of the young city's life.

The most gifted of seers must stop abashed before the attempt to reveal the whole fortunes of this lusty youngling of the prairies. Greatness awaits it, if it will merit greatness. This will not come in obedience to the fiat of written law; neither by "enterprise" alone, of whatsoever degree of acuteness or audacity. It will come along broader and opener ways, attendant upon those men of whom it is said: "They have adjusted their souls to all senses, and all biases; have propt and supported them with all foreign helps proper for them, and enrich'd and adorn'd them with all they could borrow for their advantage, both within and without the world: those are they that are plac'd in the utmost and supreme height, to which human nature can attain. They have regulated the world with politics and laws. They have instructed it with arts and sciences, and do yet instruct it by the example of their admirable manners." Mark it well: that will be the true character of the future men of the West. Moral greatness must go before any other real greatness that ever was or ever will be. Fifty years hence Omaha will be a strong city.

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